PLACE PULLING POWER: THE CASE OF LIVERPOOL '08

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ABSTRACT

The paper contributes to the developing knowledge of place branding and highlights the importance of place branding strategies, that enabling the place to seek continual development and prosperity. The theoretical concepts of place brand creators, influencers and key driving forces, together with the different brand user groups are set against both current and historic indicators of place branding to model the pulling power of place branding. Interviews with key stakeholders indicate that, in the case of the Liverpool '08 campaign, they are generally positive about the re-branding campaign and considered it to be creating a positive image that will continue to drive inward investment and increase tourism. However, it is clear that reputation and intangible factors are more important than functional and tangible factors when creating a positive brand image. Understanding place brands and the influence on the performance of the place, in terms of continuous development, regeneration and sustainability is important. Future comparative-case analyses between places that have gone through regeneration and repositioning could help to understand the significance of place branding, in terms of sustainability of place, and identify the specific facets of a place that could prove critical when putting place branding practices into action.

Keywords: Place branding, Liverpool '08, brand creators, brand users, destination

INTRODUCTION

Place branding has emerged as an academic field of study (Hankinson, 2001, Kavaratzis, 2004) in which there has been an apparent lack of empirical research (Caldwall and Freire, 2004) and little clarity or agreement about terminology and definitions (Anholt, 2004). According to Placebrands, (2006) place branding brings together a range of existing specialisms, in particular those of brand management and corporate branding, general management and marketing concepts with development policy, to create the new discipline with equal emphasis on visionary strategies and hands-on implementation, which then opens up a variety of opportunities for a place to develop and prosper.

Liverpool '08 is the re-branding campaign developed by the Liverpool Culture Company and Liverpool City Council, with the aim to "capture the dynamism and creativity of Liverpool and support Liverpool's quest to become a world class city by taking full advantage of the Capital of Culture opportunity" (Liverpool '08, 2006). Therefore, it provides an excellent opportunity to look closely at the campaign and understand its relationship with the overall development of the place. This provides an opportunity to develop further insights into the place branding concept and begins an exploration of models which may help determine the scope and interaction of place brand elements and the key indicators of place brand sustainability.

BACKGROUND

Places using events such as arts or sports led initiatives to regenerate, re-position and re-brand themselves have been well documented (Rowe and McGuirk 1999; Garcia 2004). However, whilst destination event branding has been well documented, Caldwell and Freire (2004) believe there is a lack of empirical research in the field of place branding, and Anholt (2004) notes that there is little clarity about its importance and role in the future development of the place, city or a region. The debate relating to branding is active and intriguing: brands have been used as marks of identification at some time in almost all countries and civilisations (McNeill and McNeill, 2003). However, destination branding and especially place branding is considered to be a relatively new field of study (Hankinson, 2001; Kavaratzis, 2004) which has probably evolved out of branding tourism destinations that started to gain visibility around 1998. Nonetheless, there remains a need to:

1. Carry out further study on understanding the nature of place branding, its evolution and importance in terms of continual development of the place,
2. Identify and establish the key constructs that have influenced or contributed towards place branding and
3. Establish the significance of the role of brand creators and brand users within place branding.

DESTINATION BRANDING

Tourists are shifting towards choosing a destination based on intangible attributes, such as lifestyle fulfilment and long-lasting memories of pleasure, (Lim and O'Cass, 2001) rather than making decisions based on tangible elements, such as accommodation and attractions. Hence, branding a destination in terms of intangible attributes is perhaps the most effective marketing tactic available to contemporary marketers (Morgan and Pritchard, 2004). As a result, the need for the destinations to create a unique image in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors is more critical than ever (Morgan et al., 2004). In addition, creating a unique identity has become a basic requirement of sustainable place development within an increasingly competitive global marketplace that seems to be dominated by a few leading destinations such as London, New York, Paris and Sydney that attract over two-thirds of the worldwide tourism market (Piggott, 2001).

Most of the successful brands offer social, emotional and identity value to the users as their mainstream tag lines, in line with individual brand personalities that enhance the perceived utility, desirability and quality of the product or service (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Moreover, these brands represent a unique mixture of product features and added values, both functional and non-functional, that have now taken on greater relevance and are inextricably linked to that brand, awareness of which may be conscious or intuitive (Macrae et al., 1995). It has been noted that consumers make lifestyle statements while selecting their destinations, since they are buying into emotional relationships (Urdde, 1999; Sheth et al., 1999). As a result, the competition in tomorrow's destination marketplace for consumers will not be fought over price but over the hearts and minds that ideally will match consumers' lifestyle statements. According to Morgan et al. (2004), this is how places have moved into territories previously reserved for consumer brands. It has also been noted that a lack of leadership, responsiveness and management control, together with limited availability of funds, mixed internal and external pressures will pose unique challenges to future destination marketers (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999).

In this context, developing emotional relationships with consumers is the key to destination differentiation. In addition, to build a meaningful destination brand, the essence is to create an emotional link between the destination and the potential visitors, whereby spirit of the destination is seen as a key factor in strengthening that relationship. Moreover, Pike (2005) suggests destinations are far more multidimensional constructs than consumer goods, products and other types of services. Therefore, in order to create differentiation, there is an immediate need to develop a succinct message, or slogan, that focuses on one or a few brand associations, which may be effective in winning over the consumers who are already overloaded with information about destination.

PLACE BRANDING

Place branding is a concept relating to the perceptions that people have about the place, city, region or country, and the place's reputation among those people that the place cares about and its citizens, potential investors, tourists and other visitors (Anholt, 2005). Furthermore, all these people (including residents, investors, students and visitors) have differing perceptions towards the place and therefore place branding is a complex construct, underpinned by a constantly fluctuating reputation. As a result, the place branding eventually plays a key role in decision making of the residents, potential migrants, investors, tourists and students, as to whether they choose to visit or remain in that place or not. In relation to this, Gold (2006) suggests that place branding is neither a simple message nor part of a marketing strategy, but it is actually the residual perception left in the individuals' minds about a place, after encountering its residents, through media, buying its products, experiencing its tourists attractions and in dealing with its administrative structures, or simply taking a self-guided tour of a city's streets and alleys.

O'Donovan (2004) suggests that the phrase "practice of applying brand strategy" implies a very conscious effort on the part of policy makers to employ deliberate strategies to build brand image, which would enable a place to achieve a more distinct identity than its competitors. In contrast, Pryor and Grossbart (2007) argue that that definition of place branding might be sufficient to explain the practice of place marketing, but it is insufficient for the development of a theory related to place branding. Further, they add that the non-specific nature of "other marketing techniques and disciplines" offers little guidance to understanding how, if at all, conventional strategies are adapted for place branding. They concur with the notion that place branding is a useful practice, but caution that such a reductionist definition may contribute to the application of traditional branding theory and strategy in context where it is neither intended nor tested.

Furthermore, the considerations derived from comments of the scholars, who share the conceptualization of the branding process, describing branding as having symbolic and social qualities whilst forming the basis for the production of both identity and imagery (Edwards and Day, 2005; de Chernatony, 2006).

The above definition suggests that place branding processes include both acknowledgment and dedication, which is not always the case in the domain of product and service marketing (Pitt et al., 2006). However, much of the hostility shown towards the concept of place branding arises directly from the popular or simple meaning of the terminology 'brand' and 'branding', leading to a vague assumption that the practitioners and supporters of the discipline wish to brand nations like cattle, in other words, to slap on an attractive logo and catchy slogan, and the market construct or concept is created as if it were nothing different than a new or a modified product in the supermarket (Anholt, 2005). Arguably, place brands are completely different from other forms of brands and place branding is a process that derives from interpretive, rather than common managerial, techniques (Pryor and Grossbart, 2007). Indeed, it is illogical to think that simply providing a place with a new geographical look, adding specific titles to its original name and a new slogan can change its fortunes drastically. In contrast to that, if best practices, techniques and observations from advanced and tactical branding are intelligently, creatively and responsibly applied to the branding of places, the consequences can be fascinating, long lasting, wide-spread and potentially world-changing (Anholt, 2005). Unfortunately, due to the lack of clarity about the difference between place branding and the promotion of the nation's individual assets or "products" and "constructs" such as tourism, inward investment, culture and heritage and export, not only are consumers often confused about what place branding is, but they also find it difficult to understand what is actually being branded (Anholt, 2002).

BRAND CREATORS AND BRAND USERS

A wide range of analytical methods have been used for studies on places and cities. Case studies have been used by Prideaux and Cooper (2002), convergent interviewing techniques by Hanlan and Kelly (2005), focus groups by Curtis (2000), open-ended questions and Likert scale questionnaires (O'Leary and Deegan, 2002) and the Brand's Box method (de Chernatony and McWilliam, 1989). Place brands are multi-dimensional constructs, as reviewed by Hankinson (2004 and 2005) and are

characteristically managed by multiple-stakeholders (brand creators, brand influencers and brand consumers) who help to develop and shape the brand. However, the existence of disparate stakeholder groups creates a lack of
1) brand ownership
2) brand leadership and
3) brand direction.

In the case of the "City of Liverpool", and its Liverpool '08 branding campaign, the "brand creators" include stakeholders such as Liverpool City Council, The Liverpool Chambers of Commerce (LCCC), The Mersey Partnership (TMP), The North-West Development Agency (NWDA), The Liverpool '08: European Capital of Culture Company (ECCC), Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Federation (FSME's), Voluntary Sector, Local Businesses, Corporate and Public bodies, all of whom vie for a voice in the creation of the place brand, and all of whom have different, often conflicting, wants and needs. On the other hand, there are also stakeholders who consume the brand: brand users who have no single voice to articulate their conflicting wants and needs.

Within the "City of Liverpool", "brand users" include tourists, local residents, migrants (skilled and unskilled), inward investors, corporate businesses, public sector concerns, SME's, local and government authorities. These are also equally disparate groups who influence and co-create the brand but offer no single voice and have often very different wants and needs.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to provide new insights to the existing knowledge of place branding and its importance through the study of the 'City of Liverpool' – European Capital of Culture 2008 branding campaign. The paper has already explored destination marketing literature in order give a backdrop to the current perspectives about place branding and the evolution of the place branding concept.

Here, representatives from six brand creators and five brand users were interviewed using questions that probed the respondents' perceptions of Liverpool's capability as a world-class place to visit, work and live and its economic sustainability. Respondents were drawn from;

1) *Brand creators*: including members of The Mersey Partnership, The Liverpool Cultural Company, The Liverpool City Council, Northwest Development Agency (NWDA), The Liverpool Chambers of Commerce were surveyed using semi-structured interviews, and

2) *Brand users*: including SME managers from across Liverpool, an international student cohort, members of the local communities in Liverpool, and tourists were surveyed using semi-structured open questions.

Miller and Glassner, (1997) suggested that interviews interpret relative meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences about social world. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are one of the principle methods of data collection in qualitative research. The use of semi-structured interviews gave an opportunity to identify associative relationships between different concepts, therefore allowing for understanding to be made regarding the reasons for decisions being made in terms of specific attitudes and opinions, towards certain aspects. This method allowed the researchers an excellent opportunity to probe the interviewees in more depth, with each interview lasting between 35 and 44 minutes.

Key brand creators and users allowed on limited access and this placed constraints on the project. Yet, agreement from 11 respondents representing organisations (stakeholders – authorities responsible shaping and delivering Liverpool place brand) was gained. The size of this research sample actually turned out to be very effective in terms of establishing key research outcomes. Indeed, the research findings, with the final sample size, reached convergence in terms of responses, which were recorded, after 9 interviews. The researchers carried on interviewing 2 more participants, and confirmed that theory saturation had been reached.

A computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) using NVivo was carried out to capture the nuances within the hard data. By creating a computational representation of the relationships emerging from the data an overall objectivity, important to the formation of theory development (Dohan and Sanchez-Jankowski, 1998), was formed. Moreover, transcripts were generated for each research participant interview using 'Express Scribe' software, Dictaphone recordings and researcher's notes were uploaded on to NVivo and that facilitated CAQDA. Each interview transcript was given a unique identification number between 1 and 11 (as there were 11 transcripts in total) and further to this, each of these sources was designated as an individual case, so as to enable smooth coding and use of other analysis features in NVivo. Using NVivo, the transcripts from each respondent were subjected to extensive content analysis, following procedures outlined by Krippendorff (2003) and Weber (1990). The content analysis was facilitated by careful coding of the texts and passages within each case to generate the relative concepts corresponding to the participant's responses to the probing interview questions.

RESULTS

Figure 1 represents a synthesis of the current understanding of place branding and its influence on the performance of place in terms of continuous development and regeneration, and is a composite model, synthesised from the literature and from the NVivo analysis of our primary research with the brand users and brand creators. The figure identifies spheres of influence, and those particular elements within the cocktail of constructs that appear critical for enhancing the pulling power of the place. The model integrates the key brand attributes within the primary sphere of influence (table 1) with some of the key drivers necessary to sustain the brand with time, the secondary sphere of influence (table 2); with specific Liverpool examples. Preliminary analysis of the data suggest that emotional and representational facets (culture and heritage, people and communities) are perceived to be more important than functional characters, such as inward investment and regeneration projects, and the level of amenities and services on offer in Liverpool. Furthermore, the NVivo analysis of the stakeholder data reveals a much more detailed understanding between the interconnections within the cognitive schema of brand creators and brand users. One such condensed causal map is presented in figure three and summaries the stakeholders' meta-schema.

Figure 1
The pulling power of place brand

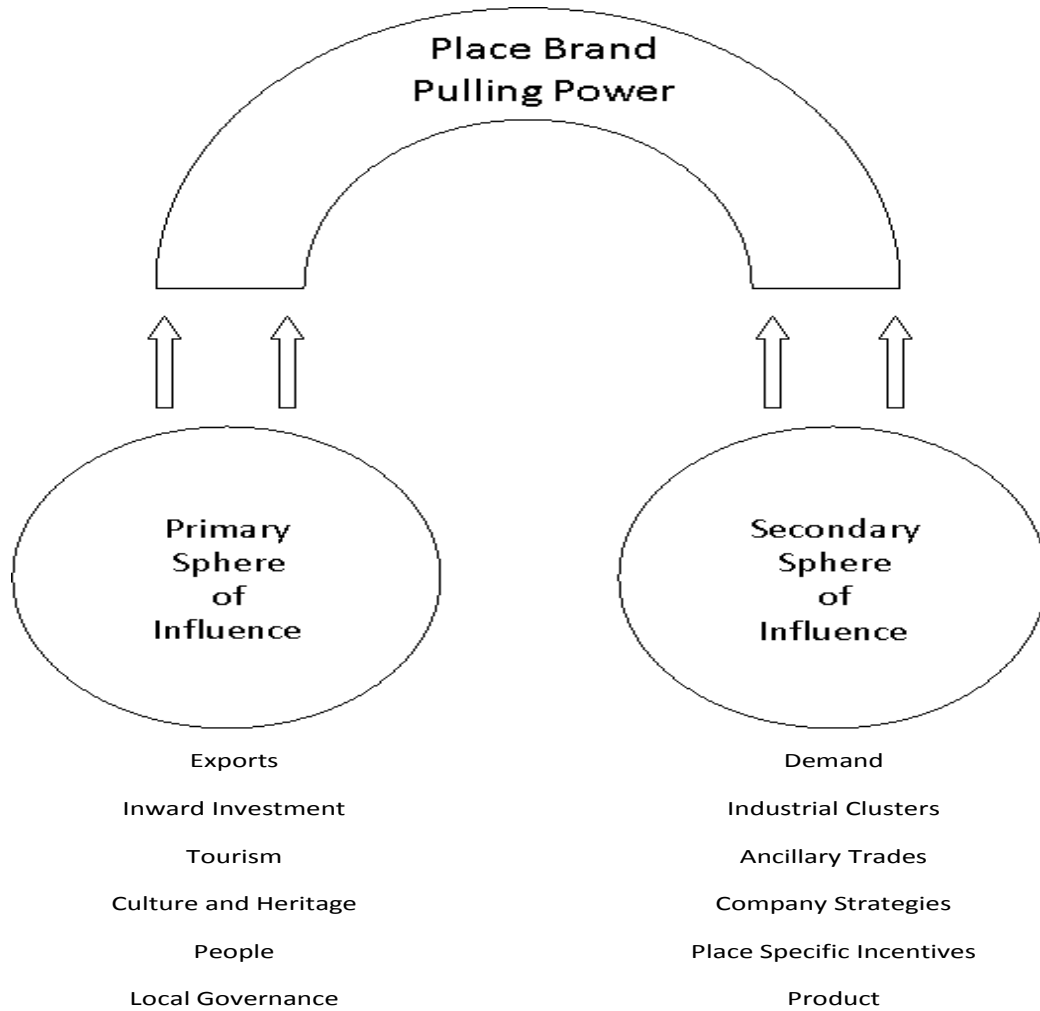| Primary Sphere of Influence	Secondary Sphere of Influence
Exports	Demand
Inward Investment	Industrial Clusters
Tourism	Ancillary Trades
Culture and Heritage	Company Strategies
People	Place Specific Incentives
Local Governance	Product

Table 1
Primary Sphere of Influence *(adapted from de Chernatony, 2006; Anholt, 2005)*

Primary Sphere of Influence	Definition	Examples
Exports	Goods and services sold out to external businesses nationally and/or internationally	Liverpool Port facility handled a record of 42 million tonnes of cargo, plus distribution warehousing. Premier League Football Clubs: Everton and Liverpool
Inward Investment	Is the amount of inflow of businesses and capital to a place	Grosvenor Property Development, investments and fund management services. £0.25 billion physical and economic regeneration work
Tourism	Service area for tourists, leisure visitors and business visitors	15 million visitors in 2008.
Culture and Heritage	Key aspects of symbolic and emotional attributes of a place	World-heritage site status, The Beatles, Football Grade 2 Buildings: more than any other city outside London
People	The group of individuals that makes up a place's society	Self-belief, passion, motivated, skills uplift, trustworthiness
Local Governance	Regulatory bodies and/or authority that create (and polices) the regulatory frameworks, policies and practices in a place	Collaborative responsibilities of stakeholders

Table 2
Secondary Sphere of Influence *(adapted from de Chernatony, 2006; Anholt 2005)*

Secondary Sphere of Influence	Definition	Examples
Demand	Relates to the wants and needs of stakeholders and the market forces for particular products and services, at particular times	Cost effective offerings of products and services
Industrial Clusters	Locally concentrated industry, with a continuous exchange of complementary goods and services	Music industry, biotech industries and pharmaceuticals, refineries
Ancillary Trades	The supply chains for the industrial clusters that enhance the primary course of economy	Health sector and environmental industries: bio-chemicals and pharmaceuticals
Company Strategies	Deliberate local and regional corporate policies that drive development and which seeks to benefit from the place	Automobile plants
Place Specific Incentives	Place offerings that attracts the diverse target audience	Infrastructure and low cost economy benefits
Product	It is the unique offering combination that differentiates a place from other places	Football, music, comedy, rich culture and architecture.

Figure 2
Stakeholders' causal map
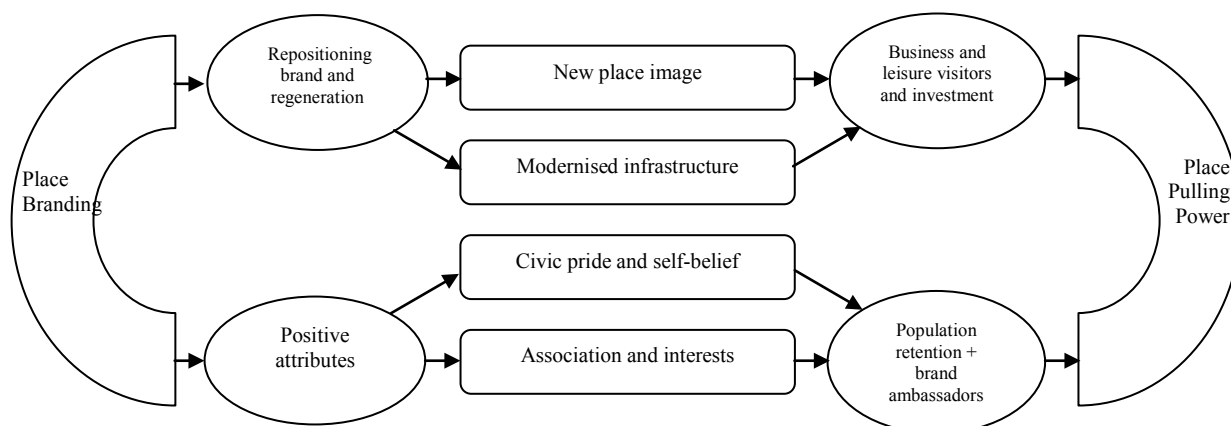
DISCUSSION

Understanding the two spheres of influence will be useful to the brand developers for creating strong and reliable place brands that would have a long-term future. Here, we draw attention to the importance the stakeholders' causal map in understanding the role of place brand by identifying perceived causalities between place branding and brand repositioning along with the formation of positive attributes. These in turn lead to the re-formation of the place image and modernised infrastructure and the re-engendering of civic pride and interest in the place. Following from the impetus of place branding, the place pulling power is strengthened through the re-invigoration of investments from leisure visitors and businesses. The pull is coupled with population retention and promotion by newly energised brand ambassadors.

Attempting to identify and classify interlinking brand facets is not new and many authors acknowledge the multiple dimensionalities of brands, including place brands, and there are numerous models and metrics which attempt to capture the various brand components. Some of these models seek to explore the more fundamental nature of brands, for instance, focusing on the functional and emotional/symbolic attributes (Cooper, 1979; de Chernatony and McWilliam, 1989, Hankinson, 2004). Other models tend to measure aspects such as brand equity, brand esteem and brand potential (Keller 2000, 2003; Kotler and Keller, 2006). The destination brand literature has complimented these typologies, often with more specific brand attributes such as weather and food (Embacher and Buttle, 1989), the geographical mix (Ashworth and Voogt, 1989), the fixed environment and recreational value (Kotler et al, 2002) or large-scale physical redevelopments and mega events (Hubbard and Hall,1998). More recently, Hankinson (2004) has proposed a Relationship Network Brand Model for destination branding, whilst Morgan et al (2005) have developed a destination brand benefit prism. Anholt on the other hand, has created both a destination brand hexagon (Anholt, 2005) and a city brand hexagon (Anholt, 2006). However, despite growing interest in branding models, and in place branding models in particular, they give no sense of how the various brand components interact, nor do they offer a sense of their relative importance in sustaining brand image over time. That is in contrast to the results of our research, which begin to make sense of the importance of brand creators and brand users perspectives. And so we begin to investigate further the place branding construct, the juxtaposition of the two spheres and gain detailed understanding of the values and the relationships between concepts, drawn from the schema of brand creators and users.

CONCLUSION

A place brand is an amalgam of concepts; ranging from embedded culture and heritage to traditional industrial clusters and from country-of-origin product differentiation to its ancillary trades. However, the recent advance concerning place marketing and destination branding knowledge pushes individual places to develop their own unique brand identity that encompasses the place's culture, communities and its values, governance, attraction, image, trade, infrastructure and investments, making the place brand the major driver of economy. The conceptual model (figure 1) and the causal map (figure 2) show some modern facets of place, as primary and interlinking influences, that are pulled in to develop the place by place branding. Other traditional facets are embedded within place and are shown here as the secondary influences, these play a supportive and guiding role to the primary influences. Interlinking causal maps derived from brand users and brand creators will be important in advancing our understanding of the place branding process. In order to develop a unique place identity, attention must be drawn to each of the primary influences, which could be used to analyse the place's brand. Those primary influences are important as they make up the rational and emotional foundations of the place. Fostering strong relationships, built on the positive emotional aspects of place, between brand creators, brand users, people and communities, will maintain a virtuous perceptual spiral that in turn positively promotes the place brand. However, place brand sustainability and longevity that is likely to be dependent on the factors within the secondary sphere of influence which contribute to the economic well-being of the place: the industries intrinsic to the place, their supply chains, access to appropriate skills, demand levels and business incentives specific to the place. How all those influences interact is to be the subject of our continuing research.

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